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Meth Busters Incorporated: A Beacon of Hope in Methamphetamine Contamination Remediation

Clarence J. Natomagan

OWNER – MBI



Clarence J. Natomagan

In recent years, the issue of drug contamination in residential properties, particularly the presence of methamphetamine residues, has become a pressing concern for many communities, especially Indigenous reserves and municipalities. This problem not only poses health risks to occupants, especially children, but also has far-reaching implications for property values, community safety, and environmental well-being. The increasing number of abandoned and contaminated properties, primarily due to drug use, has left many communities grappling with the complex challenge of remediation and revitalization.

Meth Busters Incorporated (MBI) is focused on offering a comprehensive and effective solution to the pressing issue of methamphetamine contamination. I founded MBI in 2020 in Pinehouse Lake, Saskatchewan, to address this critical issue head-on.

By combining environmental stewardship, technical expertise, and a commitment to fostering economic development, MBI is participating in the revitalization of neglected properties and the restoration of community homes—and the subsequent well-being of the tenants—in northern Saskatchewan.

I am excited to share the story of MBI—exploring its origins, unique approach, challenges, and positive impact on Indigenous communities. By recounting MBI's journey and strategies, I hope to shed light on innovative strategies for addressing the challenges posed by drug contamination, thereby contributing to the broader landscape of Indigenous economic development.

WHO I AM

I grew up in the small community of Pinehouse Lake in northern Saskatchewan, a beautiful community nestled on the shores of the Churchill River system. I grew up in an era and place where domestic violence was rampant and alcoholism abounded: because of this, the career options available to me were not very inviting, and my personal outlook was confused. However, my Mom taught me one important thing: “persevere, never back down!” To achieve this, I endeavored to be the best at whatever I tried. At 15, I suspended my colonial learning to fish commercially for my Uncle. This provided my first lesson in finance—don't work without a written contract or a fire extinguisher because you'll get burned!

At 17, I went back at school. There were only two of us in my program and we were placed in a mezzanine-style upper deck in the library: the ceiling was 6 feet high, and I was 6'2". There was no teacher, only mailed documents for me to read and learn from. I decided I wasn't going to let the principal determine what my education would be. I grabbed a pen and began writing about how the correspondence environment—and its lack of teachers—would affect my life and limit my career options. I had researched the school division and knew they had funding for students like me to attend classes elsewhere with real teachers. When the principal later came crashing up the stairwell, beet red with anger, I knew someone in Regina had heard me. He let me have it, mentioning my letter and screaming, “You have no right to do that!” I didn't know then that the Director of Education had just got off the phone with him. So, at 17, I learned an important life lesson: the power of the pen. Two years later, I graduated from Churchill Community High School in La Ronge, SK.

Through research and study, I became who I needed to be to excel. I have worked in senior government, private industry management, and construction and my three post-secondary certificates in Occupational Health and Safety, Environmental and Radiation Sampling and Monitoring, and Radiation Technology were all earned while working a full-time job. The project management skills I acquired have been an asset in addressing the multifaceted challenges of methamphetamine contamination and the regulatory regime of the province and its key players. Ultimately, my academic background and practical experience in health, safety, environmental protection, and quality management systems drive MBI's success today.

Looking back though, I now see how much my childhood affected my career. My traumas drove my life in work and in play. My biggest life setback was dealing with addiction. It took too many years to realize its hold. After poring over many books, I learned late in life that the emotional environment a child lives in shapes all aspects of their adult life. I had not realized that I had been living in victimhood for most of my life. This realization allowed me to begin healing: I face my addiction every day and by choosing not to have alcohol in my life for the last four years, I believe I am creating a legacy for my family and the Indigenous nations who are part of MBI's vision. Working on myself and beginning to understand the impact of my emotional state and responses not only allows me to continue working on my physical and mental health but also allows me to effectively establish and nurture the development of MBI.

MBI'S VISION OF EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EXPERTISE

At MBI, I envision a future where communities have their own methamphetamine remediation teams, operating independently and utilizing the effective systems that my son and I have established. I want to take MBI beyond Saskatchewan: I aim to establish MBI as the premier remediation company not just in Western Canada but across our nation. Why not?

At the core of this vision is my desire to lead the field of methamphetamine remediation by setting new standards and championing excellence. My vision is deeply connected to my belief that we can take care of ourselves. But everywhere I go, the message is the opposite—there is no trust in my abilities, thus no trust in MBI's capacity. It's the same message I hear about band-run businesses. It is an uphill battle everyday.

This is my commitment: to empower First Nations communities in making their homes a safe place to live. We aim to be the light that shows our nations a path toward cleaner homes, healthier lives, and stronger communities, with community teams taking charge of their homes' remediation and creating a healthier living environment, fostering self-sufficiency, and instilling pride.

GOALS TO ACHIEVE OUR VISION

MBI strives to create a lasting, positive impact on First Nations communities through promoting tailored training, expertise, exceptional services, and health and well-being. MBI promises to transform living environments and empower communities through education, excellence, and collaboration. Our goals include:

1. Developing a tailored training program for First Nations.
2. Collaborating with Indigenous leaders and communities to educate and provide resources.
3. Empowering Band members to take charge of home remediation for self-sufficiency.

To achieve this, MBI commits to:

1. Staying updated with the latest techniques and fostering continuous learning.
2. Prioritizing team training and development.
3. Utilizing advanced equipment and environmentally-friendly practices.
4. Striving for 100% customer satisfaction.
5. Collaborating with health and government agencies for prevention.
6. Contributing to community well-being and safety.

Imagine this: a methamphetamine remediation team exists in your community, funded through Jordan's Principle (Indigenous Services Canada's pilot project on home remediation, repairs, and community development initiatives). These funding streams flow into community health directorates that would procure the services of the community's methamphetamine remediation team, thus creating employment opportunities and immediate remediation capacity to deal with contaminated homes. Homes no longer sit boarded up for several years.

CLEANING PROCESS AND EXPERTISE

MBI's approach to methamphetamine contamination remediation revolves around a systematic three-phase process, ensuring properties are thoroughly cleaned of contaminants and restored to safe and habitable conditions. This process highlights MBI's commitment to safety, health, and environmental preservation and avoids adding to the current housing crisis. We continue to save homes for people who desperately need them.

Phase I: Assessment

This is handled by a qualified third-party assessment agency to avoid a conflict of interest. The expert agency visits the contaminated property and collects samples for laboratory testing, confirming the presence and extent of contamination. This preliminary phase is crucial to craft a tailored plan for the property's remediation.

Phase II: Clean-Up & Remediation

The core of our expertise lies with our learned skills and product combinations for cleaning and remediating contaminated properties. Contaminated materials are removed, including furniture and carpeting. Specialized equipment is employed to clean furnace systems, ductworks, walls, ceilings, and floors. Approved cleaning agents are used to methodically clean surfaces to ensure the removal of methamphetamine residue. This is the most critical phase—it makes or breaks us. Every team member adheres to stringent cleaning, health, and safety protocols to ensure a successful remediation.

Phase III: Retesting and Verification

Once the remediation is completed, MBI's third-party agency retests the property to confirm it is free of contamination. The analysis is performed by an accredited

laboratory. If contamination levels meet health standards, a final report is generated, detailing the property's condition and its rent readiness.

At every step of the remediation process, safety, health, and environmental protection remain paramount for all. MBI strictly adheres to industry standards and also develops new standards based on experience with the goal of quality improvement.

A FAMILY BUSINESS

The idea for this company came after talking with a local contractor and realizing that methamphetamine use is at crisis levels in communities. While there is no manual, and it is not easy (there were doubters and there still are), if you asked me today, "What's it like owning a business?" I would say, "It's the only way to go!"

At MBI, I don't want just a team—I want a family team that adds value to our company through dedication to their team and MBI standards. Our core team consists of myself, my awesome wife Sarah, and my son Aidon. I lead the company's growth, budgeting, marketing, and strategic development. Sarah manages our company's financial operations. She is the one that ensures financial records are maintained accurately and transparently and makes sure we go from one project to the next with as few hiccups as possible. Aidon is the frontline supervisor overseeing two teams within MBI. His role involves coordinating and managing daily operations, ensuring that the company's procedures and safe work practices are rigorously followed. Aidon's hands-on experience, coupled with his certification as a methamphetamine remediation technician, positions him as a proficient leader on the ground.

Beyond our business operations, I have an innate desire to help our communities. We help in events geared to community wellness. We participate in local events that serve those in need, providing food, clothing, and support to the homeless and underprivileged. We want to have a positive local impact when times are favorable for Meth Busters Incorporated.

As the owner and leader, I set the company's tone by practicing and advocating for respect in the workplace. I want MBI's workplace to have an inclusive culture, to be respectful, and to be harassment-free: *this is of utmost importance to me*. I also want MBI to leave a legacy that we can take care of ourselves and our own homes. Through education and imparting what we've learned to our Indigenous communities, this can be done.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

I struggle with this part of my story. What do I say? What can I say? Because there is no manual for setting up and running a business, I always believed that all it took to be successful was an education, hard-work, and consistent performance. However, the saying, "In order to be successful, it's who you know!" is true. You might say, "It doesn't work that way." Well, it does! As one businessman told me, "You'll suffer for at least three years!" Well—he was right! Building a new business requires commitment, dedication, and collaboration. It can be a challenging process: after three years of working with executive level Chiefs and Councils, I have still not received any requests from the Grand Councils—but I have been contacted by a few communities willing to fight the methamphetamine epidemic on their own. I have lived and worked through

our crab-in-the-bucket challenges and communities are beginning to solicit MBI for help. Our story is spreading, and I believe our communities are now seeing us as a legitimate option.

While my vision is to have Meth Buster teams remediating homes in every province, it is not the entire solution. In my pursuit of creating a sustainable team in each community, I knew that I had to create strategic partnerships, network, and cultivate relationships in the industry. As I write this, calls of opportunity are beginning to pour in. What do we do now? All the travelling, emails, letters, and conversations—both good and bad—have led to this. The hours of preparation to engage and confer with industry professionals, community leaders, and potential clients has allowed me to create opportunities for exposure, education, and collaboration. By collaborating with other corporations that provide complementary services, such as testing, MBI ensures a well-rounded approach to contamination remediation. These partnerships also help us mitigate potential conflicts of interest and foster a more comprehensive and unbiased assessment of contaminated homes.

However, building connections was not the only challenge. Naively, I only expected to suffer from a lack of work during the growing pains of my new business. In reality, the battle was three-fold: establishing business connections, yes, but also encountering authorities who I felt overextended their powers, and confronting the traumas associated with childhood experiences and their impact on every decision and interaction you have with people and businesses.

Regarding authorities who overextend their powers: if policies don't make sense, then don't hesitate to question and challenge them. In my experience, there were times when ghost policies were used by several persons in government agencies and MBI clients to support a decision that was not helpful to MBI. Did the policy really exist or was it just the individual's approach? When this has happened, I have used several tactics. I did my homework before I had a meeting with the decision-makers where I asked to see a copy of the policy they had mentioned. I am also persistent and gathered as much information as possible (for example, on the standards used by government inspectors when inspecting remediated homes) to ensure my case was built on facts. Because I was prepared, I could show that MBI met all policies that actually existed.

Being informed is crucial to a businesses' success. I am 6'2" and 275 lbs: because of this, I am sometimes perceived as intimidating and adversarial. To combat this, I ensure my approach is always well informed. I choose to be great at what I do and part of that is learning others' systems: I will speak with you on your terms because I chose to learn about you and your business. When I begin to highlight others' systems and rules, the relationship changes. Today, my relationship with the province is blossoming into what I wanted from the beginning: a mutually respectful relationship where the Province of Saskatchewan can believe in, and thus work with, MBI as a legitimate remediation company, allowing me to lead my company to be the Premier Remediation Company in Western Canada—if not all of Canada.

Positioning MBI as an example of excellence means meeting and sometimes exceeding standards. To do so, MBI will challenge authority and push boundaries when necessary: that is what I've always done and will continue to do. I teach this to

my kids and to my employees. As an experienced inspector and contractor, I grapple daily with balancing my knowledge and insight of governments and people in general against industry norms and expectations. The struggle to initiate change in a system totally resistant to alterations highlights the importance of MBI's perseverance and our strategic navigation of this culture. For example, I met resistance to improving current standards for remediation when I shared international standards with a government department—but I persisted, even though they probably felt harassed. A transformation is gradually beginning to shape the system to the advantage of us contractors.

My mantra is that it is necessary to present solutions to problems rather than simply identifying the problem and expecting solutions. Presenting solutions requires work. It requires research, preparation, and stakeholder engagement. The complexities of methamphetamine remediation necessitate constant vigilance and a multidimensional approach, combining rigorous adherence to protocols with adaptability to unforeseen circumstances. With a background in ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems (international guidance that is universally trusted by organizations and boosts the quality of business operations), MBI is committed to accurate procedures, periodic data review, action meetings, site visits, and ongoing and effective communication that demonstrates high standards of quality.

But while success stories are important, so too is dealing with failures. A very memorable instance was a failed paint job. I drove close to three hours to inspect a unit that I had painted. I entered the unit and was aghast at what I saw: entire sheets of paint falling off the wall—literally. Sheets of paint peeled off from the stippled ceiling: talk about anxiety! With my TapRoot training (a world-wide system for identifying and fixing all types of critical problems), I conducted an exhaustive investigation and uncovered causal factors. The subsequent corrective actions illustrated the value of investigating and addressing failures, turning them into opportunities for growth. This example showed us how to transform these setbacks into stepping stones and was a catalyst for growth—for progress! This was discussed amongst our team and boy, did we learn something that day.

In navigating through these challenges and learning from failures, we're able to continue to practice the essence of resilience, adaptability, and perseverance. These lessons have taught me the significance of sharing knowledge. We cannot and should not hoard knowledge. We must teach and share our knowledge. By sharing our learnings, we can make our communities and ourselves better.

By sharing my experiences, I believe that I am creating a blueprint for aspiring entrepreneurs and individuals striving for success. The principles of thorough research, continuous learning, mentorship, and strategic outreach are my guiding lights. MBI's journey—and where it is today--has been achieved through the power of determination, knowledge, and relationships. The story of MBI's challenges is being transformed into triumphs through sheer dedication and unwavering belief. But is that all it takes to be successful or even just to make it through every day? The answer is no. There needs to be someone (or in my case, two someones) who believes in you, someone on the inside. Find that someone!

FINAL THOUGHTS

As I write this, it is now 4:33 a.m. This day started like any other day. I get up at 3 a.m. and have a coffee. My deadline for this article is this morning and I have a presentation to a non-profit family support agency at 9 a.m. I struggle with my rewrites. And I struggle with the truth. “Tell it from the heart,” is the advice. That is easier said than done because there are societal and business rules and etiquette to follow. Those rules are not in any manual. You learn through osmosis. You simply learn quickly what matters and which matters are worth conflict. At 7 a.m. I will depart to Saskatoon to do my presentation. We will talk about the risks associated with methamphetamine residues in homes and how to protect oneself. My cousin Eric is going to drive me there. He is here to learn about methamphetamine remediation in hopes that, if he likes it, he will start his own company. Yay, MBI! We are at the cusp of unprecedented growth in 2024 and looking forward to the challenge.

Oh, did I forget to mention, I am also a certified mold remediator and inspector. After only two houses, our third mold job attained the lowest spore counts ever seen by provincial inspectors. But that’s another story!